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FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0014  
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003357

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/11/2018

TAGS: KIRF PGOV PREL I2

SUBJECT: CHRISTIAN POLITICIANS COOPERATE ON ARTICLE 50  
REVISION

REF: A. BAGHDAD 3082

IB. BAGHDAD 3244

Classified By: By Deputy Political Counselor Steve Walker for reasons 1 .4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Iraq's two Christian parliamentarians, political bloc leaders, and other minority representatives are redrafting Article 50, which was excluded from the Provincial Elections Law (PEL) parliament passed on September 24 (reftel). (Note: Article 50 would have established set-aside seats for minorities on provincial councils in six provinces. End Note.) The two Christian MPs, who have temporarily set aside their differences, want the revised Article 50 to guarantee three seats for Christians on the provincial councils of both Baghdad and Ninewa and one seat on the council in Basrah. In addition, they hope to allocate a single seat on the councils in Baghdad and Amarah for the Sabaeen-Mandaean community. They are also pushing for separate ballots and voting districts for Christians and other minorities. Led by Acting Speaker Attiyah, opponents of this plan propose a quota of one seat only for Christians in each of the above-named cities. End Summary.

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Christian Collaboration  
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¶2. (C) In separate meetings on October 10 and 11, Assyrian Democratic Movement leader Younadam Kanna and Chaldean Democratic Union Party leader Ablahad Afram Sawa told Poloff that Council of Representative (CoR) bloc leaders were negotiating to redraft Article 50 of the Provincial Elections Law (PEL), but that so far nothing had been agreed upon. Kanna and Sawa have proposed a reformulated Article 50 that would stipulate three seats for Christians on provincial councils in both Baghdad and Ninewa (Mosul), and one seat in Basrah. The two also proposed separate ballots and voting districts for minorities, so that any one minority would run only against candidates of his/her own group. Sawa said that many CoR members support the Christian position, but that their bloc leaders do not. (Comment: This strikes us as a bit optimistic. End comment.)

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Minority Solidarity  
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¶3. (C) While Christians are the largest minority group in Iraq, other minority groups seeking representation, such as the Sabaeen-Mandaean, Yezidis and Shabak, are struggling to be heard in the Article 50 debate. The energetic Kanna is standing up for the tiny Sabaeen-Mandaean community, which was not allocated any seats under the original Article 50. Kanna claims he was promised a seat for a Sabaeen-Mandaean in Baghdad and said he is lobbying hard to get them a seat in Amarah (Maysan). Both Kanna and Sawa dismissed Yezidi CoR member Mahma Khalil's (KDP) claim that there are nearly half a million Yezidis in Ninewa and call for a four or five seat quota for Yezidis on the provincial council. Kanna believes

Khalil will back down and settle for less. Kurdish bloc leaders are fighting any seat allocations for the Shabak, which they regard as ethnic Kurds. The Shabak themselves disagree as to whether they constitute a separate ethnicity. According to Sawa, three Shabak from Mosul (NFI) met with Acting Speaker Attiyah and Deputy Speaker Tayfur on October 11 to assert that they consider themselves Kurds. Kanna believes if the Shabak are allocated seats, they will be satisfied with one seat in Ninewa.

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Confronting Minority Quota Opponents  
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¶4. (C) Both Kanna and Sawa lamented the fact that CoR Speaker Mashadani is out of the country. In their view, Acting Speaker Attiyah is inherently hostile toward minority quotas and is playing an obstructionist game. Kanna also lambasted the "Baathists" -- meaning Tawafiq -- for trying to minimize minority quotas by insisting on not more than one seat for any individual minority in any area. This would work out to one seat each for Christians, Shabaks, and Yezidis in Ninewa; one Christian and one Sabaeen-Mandaean seat in Baghdad, and one Christian seat in Basrah.

¶5. (C) According to Kanna, Attiyah is proposing that the CoR Provincial Affairs Committee and minority representatives draft a paper on population numbers of each minority and propose other mechanisms to grant minorities political representation. Kanna dismissed this as an ad hoc census, and a stalling tactic. He is particularly upset about Attiyah's idea that the minority quotas ultimately decided on

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for the provincial council elections will be subject to revision following a national census currently planned for October 2009.

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Personal Differences  
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¶6. (C) The Assyrian Kanna and the Chaldean Sawa have a cool relationship due to what Kanna sees as Sawa's lack of political independence (Sawa's party is part of the Kurdish Alliance) and Sawa's insistence on applying the differentiation among the various Christian sects to politics. On the other hand, Sawa believes joining forces with the Kurdish Alliance was his only option for increasing Christian representation in the CoR and regards Kanna as egotistical and overbearing. Nevertheless, Kanna and Sawa are cooperating to support minority rights with regard to inclusion of quotas in the PEL. Sawa noted that he has not been able to convince Kanna to join him in a united public position on the minorities representation issue. Sawa regards this as evidence of Kanna egotism and selfishness.

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Comment  
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¶7. (C) The negotiations in the CoR to come up with a mechanism to guarantee minority representation on the provincial councils continue. There have been a number of competing proposals. Kanna and Sawa's collaboration on the Article 50 negotiations is a welcome change from their usual avoidance of each other; Kanna's support for other minorities is also positive. Both are attending additional meetings on Article 50 and will keep us informed of developments.

CROCKER